

End the siege on Gaza now” say MEPs visiting the territory

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A delegation of nine Members of the European Parliament, from the Foreign Affairs, Budgets and Development committees, left the Gaza Strip on Friday after a fact-finding mission hosted by UNRWA. The delegation monitored and assessed the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact of EU financial assistance.

The visit was made possible thanks to the support of the Egyptian authorities whose invaluable help was highly appreciated by the delegation.

“The alarming and worsening humanitarian situation calls for an immediate, comprehensive and lasting end to the Israeli blockade on Gaza,” said the delegation. This call comes at a time when violence in Gaza has fallen sharply.

The delegation points out that the siege has completely isolated the people of Gaza, condemning them to a life of extreme poverty, with 80% of the population dependant on food aid. Not only is the blockade hurting the population and creating a black market, it is also playing into the hands of the most radical factions and empowering them by providing them with extra funds: “The blockade must be lifted in order to allow full access to humanitarian assistance, to enable reconstruction and to give a new lease of life to legitimate economic activity and hope to the population,” said the MEPs.

“UNRWA is doing a fantastic job, but it is starved of funds. The EU and other donors must urgently come up with more funding for UNRWA’s work, especially for education, which represents 80% of its budget. Every year there are thousands more school-age children but there is no more money to build additional schools and pay teachers”. The MEPs say they will do everything within their means to ensure Parliament as a whole increases financial support to UNRWA.

“The EU must launch a political initiative without delay to lift the blockade and begin reconstruction of basic infrastructure. ‘Seeing is believing’ when it comes to understanding the situation in Gaza. Only two EU Foreign Ministers have so far visited Gaza. We call on the remaining 25 to go and see the situation on the ground. The EU must actively engage to become a genuine peace player.”

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### **Information on the delegation's activities**

The delegation visited the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) Housing Project in Khan Younis, which has been put on hold due to the blockade despite being fully financed, and held an exchange of views with the Board of Directors of the Bank of Palestine, responsible for PEGASE payments to vulnerable Gazan families. UNRWA Operational Director for Gaza John Ging, briefed members on the challenges facing UNRWA and the desperate situation of the Gazan population. The delegation also held talks with human rights defenders and business leaders and visited the Rafah tunnel area and observed black market activities.

### **MEPs taking part in the delegation in Gaza**

Eva JOLY (Chair, Development Committee, Greens/EFA, FR)

Michèle STRIFFLER (Vice Chair Development Committee, EPP, FR)

Ivailo KALFIN (Vice Chair Budgets Committee, S&D, BG)

Lajos BOKROS (Budgets Committee, ECR, HU)

Véronique DE KEYSER (Foreign Affairs Committee, S&D, BE)

Marielle DE SARNEZ (Foreign Affairs Committee, ALDE, FR)

Göran FÄRM (Budgets Committee, S&D, SE)

Nicole KIIL-NIELSEN (Foreign Affairs Committee, Greens/EFA, FR)

Ivo VAJGL (Development Committee, ALDE, SL)